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KHARGE, RAHUL WRITE TO PM, SEEK LAW TO RESTORE STATEHOOD OF J&K

In their letter, Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi said the legislation should be brought in Parliament's Monsoon session

'INCLUDE LADAKH UNDER 6TH SCHEDULE'

The leaders of opposition in the two houses of Parliament—Kharge in Rajya Sabha and Gandhi in Lok Sabha—also called on the government to bring a legislation to include the Union Territory of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The Sixth Schedule is constitutionally protected, ensuring greater autonomy and security for local governance

ALL-PARTY MEETING LIKELY ON SATURDAY

- The upcoming session is likely to be stormy as Opposition members are gearing up raise the Pahalgam attack, leak of the interim report on the Ahmedabad air crash in the international media, etc | P9
- Sources said the government may convene an all-party meeting on July 19, two days before the Monsoon session's commencement

JULY 21

FIRST DAY OF THE MONSOON SESSION, WILL GO ON TILL AUGUST 21

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

'SIT misdirected itself' in Ashoka prof case, says SC

Asks why it expanded scope of investigation into Mahmudabad's FB post on Op Sindoor

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

QUESTIONING the line of probe by a Haryana police Special Investigation Team (SIT) into social media posts by Ashoka University professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad on Operation Sindoor, the Supreme Court on Wednesday observed "it had misdirected itself."

The court had ordered the setting up of the SIT to examine if there was anything incriminating in the social media posts by Mahmudabad.

A K Mahmudabad

In its interim report, the SIT said it had seized Mahmudabad's mobile phones and sent them for forensic analysis. It further revealed that he had appeared before the SIT for questioning four times.

A bench of justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi wondered why the SIT was expanding the scope of the probe. It said its direction was to confine the investigation to the two FIRs against Mahmudabad over his contentious social media posts.

"We are asking why SIT is, on the face of it, misdirecting itself? They were supposed to examine the contents of the posts," Justice Kant said.

"It is open for the SIT to say that the contents of the FIRs does not disclose any offence. Then this case can be closed. It can always say that during the course of investigation, they have come across certain incriminating materials, which constitute separate offences and the law will take its own course," the bench said.

When the state's lawyer said Mahmudabad could be asked to join the investigation at any point again, a surprised court said, "You do not need him, you need a dictionary."

The bench directed the SIT to submit its report in four weeks.

Granting some liberty and relaxation on his bail conditions, the court said Mahmudabad is now free to write on any subject other than the matter pending before the court.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Mahmudabad, told the court that the SIT had also questioned the professor about the places he had travelled to in the past 10 years.

Mahmudabad had moved the court challenging his arrest following a Facebook post on Operation Sindoor, India's retaliatory strike against Pakistan for the Pahalgam terror attack.

Don at it again on India deal

DIPAK MONDAL @ New Delhi

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said a trade deal with India would soon be sealed under which American firms would get greater access to Indian markets.

According to Trump, the trade pact with India will be on the lines of the US-Indonesia deal announced early in the day.

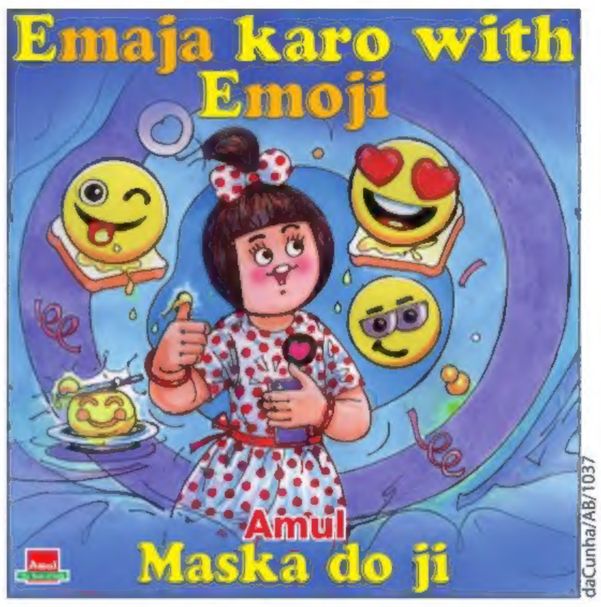
"They are going to pay 19% and we are going to pay nothing ... we will have full access into Indonesia, and we have a couple of those deals that are going to be announced," Trump said, adding that the deal with India will be on the same line.

India has not formally reacted to Trump's claims, but officials say that the US president has the habit of making tall claims in public, which are far from reality. They cite the example of the Vietnam deal; Trump had claimed the South East Asian country had agreed to a 20% tariff, but Hanoi rejected the claim.

India has maintained that it will not sign any deal that is against the country's interest. New Delhi and Washington are in talks to finalise a trade deal before August 1, the new deadline for imposing the reciprocal tariff. The US has announced a 26% tariff on India, but has put on hold the tariff for now. Currently, only a 10% basic tariff is in place.

An Indian team is in the US for carrying out the fifth round of negotiations on the bilateral trade agreement. Chief negotiator and commerce secretary-designate Rajesh Agrawal on Tuesday said that the Indo-US trade deal was progressing as per the terms of reference decided between the two countries agreed in February.

The US has already announced reciprocal tariff between 25-40% against two dozen nations.



Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot at the AICC OBC Advisory Council meeting in Bengaluru on Wednesday | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

Cabinet may give nod for N-plant

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE state cabinet is likely to give an in-principle approval for a proposed nuclear power plant in the state on Thursday, despite opposition from villagers living near places identified for the project.

The cabinet could give permission to the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) to carry out a preliminary study of the places -- Koppal, Vijayapura, Raichur and others -- proposed for the project.

In this year's Union Budget, there is a significant push for nuclear energy as part of India's long-term energy transition strategy. The Union government has set a target of 100 gigawatts of nuclear power capacity by 2047 and wants nuclear to be a major source of power in the country, reducing the burden on fossil fuels.

The cabinet is also expected to discuss the report submitted by Justice John Michael D'Cunha on the stampede during the RCB's victory celebration near Chinnaswamy Stadium that claimed 11 lives on June 4. It is likely to discuss the government's decision to withdraw the notification to acquire 1,777 acres of land for a defence and aerospace park near Devanahalli near Bengaluru. As a fallout of that the Andhra Pradesh government is trying to woo industrialists, which will likely come up for discussion too.

Relative rejects blood money offer

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

EFFORTS are in full throttle to convince the family of Talal Abdo Mahdi, the Yemeni national murdered in 2017, to accept blood money in return for sparing Indian nurse Nimisha Priya from execution. This comes even as one of Mahdi's family members publicly rejected reconciliation.

Nimisha Priya

"We are making all efforts to get Nimisha spared from the death sentence, and negotiators are working on getting the immediate family to collectively accept the blood money offer. This mandatory process could be long and we need to have patience," her lawyer Subhash Chandran told this paper.

Her execution, originally scheduled for Wednesday was postponed following interventions from various quarters. In a Facebook post, Mahdi's brother, Abdelfattah Mahdi, condemned the delay and reaffirmed the family's position: "Now it's been postponed and we were not expecting that—unfortunately—especially that those who have stopped the implementation know our absolute refusal to any attempt to reconcile in any form... pressure won't move us. Retribution will come."

Priya's legal team and supporters are working to evolve consensus within the Mahdi family to accept blood money and pardon her.

IT'S NOT A SETBACK: COUNSEL

"We do not see this as a setback, but as part of a longer process. Our goal is to bring the entire family around," Chandran said. A source familiar with the negotiation said: "We are mounting a collective effort. Govt continues to provide help for conversation with the victim's family for a settlement."

MASS BURIAL CASE

Dharmasthala whistleblower goes missing

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Mangaluru

THE whistleblower in the high-profile Dharmasthala secret burial case has gone missing just days after being granted witness protection. Dakshina Kannada Superintendent of Police Dr Arun K said that the witness's whereabouts remain unknown, effectively stalling any attempt to provide physical protection. Citing legal protocol under Rule 7, the SP noted that witness protection requires both consent and active cooperation, neither of which has been forthcoming.

The police said on July 10, a formal communication was sent to the complainant's legal representative, outlining the necessary procedures for extending protection. However, correspondence has remained limited to email and no concrete information regarding the witness's current location has been shared.

An official report filed by the DySP to higher authorities states that without verifiable contact or cooperation, enforcement of the protection order is not feasible. Authorities warned that if the witness remains untraceable while the case is being investigated further, lack of information may critically impact the case.

The police said despite an earlier request to protect the witness's identity, his lawyer publicly disclosed sensitive details through press releases and media interactions. When questioned, the lawyer said it was done at the request of the complainant.

NOT MISSING: LAWYERS | P4

EXPRESS READ

Spl court lambasts Lokayukta police

Bengaluru: "Is there a different kind of justice for accused police officers and other public servants, that too in alleged extortion in the Lokayukta," judge KM Radhakrishna asked Lokayukta police for not seeking custodial interrogation of IPS officer Srinath Mahadev Joshi | P2

EXPRESS INTAKE

Byrathi Basavaraj booked in rowdy murder case | P4

BRIGHT MOVES

At women's chess World Cup, China faces new threat—India

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN @ Chennai

Divya Deshmukh against Zhu Jiner at the event | FIDE/ANNA SHTOURMAN

THE Chinese women's dominance of the 64 squares faces an existential threat from an upcoming force. India. At the ongoing women's World Cup in Batumi, there are four from China in the last 16, including two World Championship runners-up. The reigning world champion, Ju Wenjun, declined to take part but they are still well represented, both in terms of quality and quantity.

India, though, aren't too far back. The gold medallists from last year's Olympiad also have four players in the pre-quarterfinals. In the only direct confrontation between the two nations in the last-16, Divya Deshmukh took down Zhu Jiner (a GM) in the first tie (Deshmukh, an IM, is one of the country's brightest prospects). In a queen-centric endgame versus Jiner, Deshmukh, an age-group world champion, completely asserted her position as her pieces had better coordination and were very active. After building up an imposing advantage, she played the decisive 49. Qf7+ and Jiner resigned on the spot. If the 19-year-old draws with black pieces on Thursday, she will advance to the quarterfinals.

The teen was joined by young R Vaishali, seasoned D Harika and Koneru Humpy in the last 16 after the first three rounds in Georgia. The other three drew their opening ties and they will all advance if they win on Thursday. The women's World Cup is important as it carries with it as many as three qualification places for next year's women's Candidates.

CANDIDATES CALLING

World Cup carries three qualification spots. Vaishali and Humpy played in 2024 but qualified through other pathways. If players qualify through World Cup, they can have 7-8 months to prepare

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